

We're All in This Together

The world is struggling to cope with an unseen, deadly enemy that is threatening human lives. In March 2020, California State University Long Beach (CSULB), enforced procedures to keep students safe from Coronavirus (COVID-19), a new virus that affects the lungs, airways and sometimes causes death. The policies and guidelines created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), became mandatory as the virus continued to spread. People worldwide have been affected individually by this virus, forcing them into a new lifestyle: a lifestyle that has brought many disappointments and little success. For many students, the virus has driven us into unfortunate events, questioning our future, dealing with mental health, and living a strange life. COVID-19 has devastated the world, but for me, as an individual, it has hampered my life and my future. It has also threatened the lives of the ones I love.

My first encounter with COVID-19 regulations and procedures was at CSULB. Some of the regulations CSULB enforced were the cancellations of classes, leading to the campus lockdown. The cancellation of in-person classes was devastating, and separating so abruptly from my studies, friends, and social life took a significant toll on me. Many college students know, the school campus is a social environment where we can interact with friends, classmates, and school staff. Students around the country were also affected by these guidelines as education became a virtual learning system.

Virtual learning was now mandatory for schools around the world. Students like me were not prepared for the new guidelines the campus had introduced, and the shortage of materials did not help. I began to worry about my future at CSULB. Virtual learning required computers with cameras for Zoom lectures and Wi-Fi. Before COVID-19, I would spend most of my time at the

school library using the computers, Wi-Fi connection, and other materials accessible to all students. As I failed to gather all the required materials to continue my semester at CSULB, my grades took a turn for the worst. I had no choice but to drop my classes. Dropping my classes caused me to delay my graduation ceremony. At this point, I questioned my career and the choices I was making. I often think about my future at CSULB and how I might never go back to the campus. As a first-generation college student, graduation is very important.

This is not the first time a global virus has threatened lives. Over the years, people have died due to viruses the human body is not able to handle. But we have overcome challenging and stressful times. With this new virus, millennials and younger generations have been hit the hardest. With the new learning system, many students have given up. Virtual learning for elementary students could be the worst way to educate young minds. Not to mention, some students don't have the proper setting or materials to continue their education. The younger crowd needs in-person interaction in a school environment to interact with friends, classmates, and school staff.

The stress this virus brought to all students has been challenging to cope with. As we all know, college students deal with stress, anxiety, and sometimes depression. Students take full loads of classes to achieve their goals and graduate. Not to mention, they have part-time and full-time jobs to maintain a simple lifestyle. When the campus shut down, a small relief came upon me. I thought by staying home, saving gas, and dedicating my driving time for schoolwork would help me stay focused and get ahead. But I was wrong. That's when I realized COVID-19 started to affect my mental health.

Since the virus was "new" to America, we had to take extra precautions to keep my family and myself safe. As a family, we decided to avoid all social gatherings until further

notice. Friends, daycare, and school events were no longer available for discussion. I thought by avoiding large crowds, picking, and choosing who I was hanging out with would lower my risk of getting infected. But I couldn't risk my health and the health of my family for a good time with my friends. My life came to a complete stop. I was home with my parents all day, every day, and nowhere to go. It seemed like I played with all the board games in the house and ate all the snacks available and still found myself bored. My time and energy were being wasted by the minute. My anxiety was through the roof. For months, this was my life, and I started to hate it. I would ask myself when will this end? What else can I do? And my list of questions kept getting longer and longer.

As the oldest child of the house, I was chosen to face this virus. My responsibilities and duties around the house got longer. I was now in charge of getting food, medication, and other needs for the family. Each time I stepped outside my home, I was worried about my safety and the safety of my family. My face mask, hand sanitizer, and gloves became my weapon to fight COVID-19. Once I was geared up, I knew what measures to take in public. Each trip to the store became a routine. Worrying about the virus and bringing it home to my family started to take effect on me. Since my parents and grandparents both have medical issues, I had to take extra precautions out in public. But there was always one selfish person who refused to take essential measures to keep themselves and others safe. With no safety measures and policies, COVID-19 had continued to spread, and the death toll will be continued to rise.

It's been nine months with this virus, and this has become the new way of life. Now, I wake up and look forward to my day. I live my life without thinking about the pandemic that's happening outside my home. Like many others, I've learned to accept it. Now, the world is waiting patiently for a cure.

